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PARTICIPATION OF COALITION FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR

by

Wayne Danzik

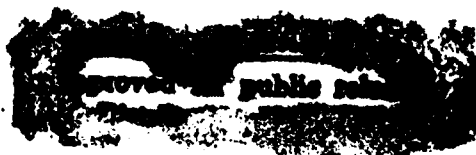
Civilian, United States Coast Guard

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

17 June 1994



94-15295



DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 1

94 5 20 093

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY OF REPORT		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.		
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) C	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION		
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841			7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER		
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)			10. SOURCE OR FUNDING NUMBERS		
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.
			WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.		
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) PARTICIPATION OF COALITION FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR (U)					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) MR. WAYNE DANZIK, USCG					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 8 FEB 1994	
				15. PAGE COUNT 39	
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	KOREAN WAR, UNITED NATIONS, COALITION		
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) THIS PAPER EXPLORES THE PARTICIPATION OF UNITED NATIONS COALITION FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT ARMED FORCES FROM AROUND THE WORLD FOUGHT TOGETHER UNDER THE AUSPICES OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER BE AWARE OF THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS WAR: A PROLONGED WAR LIKE KOREA--RATHER THAN A "100-HOUR WAR" LIKE DESERT STORM--MIGHT BE THE PARADIGM FOR FUTURE COALITION CONFLICTS. KEY ASPECTS OF GROUND, NAVAL, AND AIR OPERATIONS IN KOREA ARE SUMMARIZED, ALONG WITH THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR COALITION PARTNERS. ISSUES THAT AFFECTED THE EMPLOYMENT OF THESE FORCES ARE DISCUSSED AS WELL. OVERALL, THE COALITION FORCES MADE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION ON THE BATTLEFIELD. HOWEVER, THEIR EMPLOYMENT WAS AFFECTED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, SPECIAL LOGISTICS REQUIREMENTS, DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, AND VARIOUS TACTICAL ISSUES. THESE PROBLEMS POSED A CHALLENGE FOR THE COMMANDER, BUT THEIR CUMULATIVE EFFECT ON OPERATIONS WAS MINIMIZED THROUGH U.S. COMMAND OF THE WAR EFFORT, THE PREPONDERANCE OF U.S. FORCES IN KOREA, AND THE FIRM COMMITMENT OF OUR COALITION PARTNERS.					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 841-3414		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL C

Abstract of

PARTICIPATION OF COALITION FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR

This paper explores the participation of United Nations coalition forces in the Korean War. This was the first time in history that armed forces from around the world fought together under the auspices of an international organization. It is essential that the operational commander be aware of the unique characteristics of this war: a prolonged war like Korea--rather than a "100-hour war" like Desert Storm--might be the paradigm for future coalition conflicts. Key aspects of ground, naval, and air operations in Korea are summarized, along with the major contributions of our coalition partners. Issues that affected the employment of these forces are discussed as well. Overall, the coalition forces made a positive contribution on the battlefield. However, their employment was affected by political considerations, special logistics requirements, differences in language and culture, and various tactical issues. These problems posed a challenge for the commander, but their cumulative effect on operations was minimized through U.S. command of the war effort, the preponderance of U.S. forces in Korea, and the firm commitment of our coalition partners.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
ABSTRACT		ii
I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	GROUND WAR	4
	Overview of the Ground War	4
	First Commonwealth Division	4
	Other Coalition Ground Forces	5
III	NAVAL WAR	7
	Overview of the Naval War	7
	Coalition Naval Forces	8
IV	AIR WAR	9
	Overview of the Air War	9
	Coalition Air Forces	9
V	POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS	10
	Reasons for Participation	10
	Significance of Contributions	11
	Political Aspects of Coalition Assistance	12
	Employment of Forces	13
VI	LOGISTICS	14
	Food	14
	Clothing	14
	Transportation	15
	Reimbursement	16
VII	THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY	17
	Language	17
	Culture	18
	Command and Control	19
VIII	TACTICAL ISSUES	20
	Training	20
	Tactical Differences	21
	U.S. Performance on the Battlefield.	21
IX	CONCLUSION	23
NOTES		26
BIBLIOGRAPHY		33

PARTICIPATION OF COALITION FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People's Army surged across the thirty-eighth parallel under the cover of darkness and massive artillery fire. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution the same day naming North Korea an aggressor and calling for withdrawal of its armed forces. Two days later, another resolution asked U.N. members to "furnish such assistance...as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area."¹ The United States was designated the U.N.'s executive agent for the military action in Korea, and in short order a United Nations Command was established under U.S. leadership.²

The invasion of South Korea galvanized the world community into an overwhelming display of collective support. Forty-nine nations and scores of private organizations contributed supplies, food, and equipment. Five more countries provided medical units. Most important, fifteen nations from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas joined the United States in sending armed forces to Korea.³ This was the first example in history of such a diverse coalition fighting under the auspices of an international organization. They did not join together out of strategic interests based on geographical proximity, the threat of imminent attack, or the potential for economic gain. Rather, they shared

the political goals of resisting aggression and halting the spread of Communism.

Looking strictly at the number of fighting men who served in Korea, the contribution of coalition countries was small. In fact, just eleven years after the end of the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised against relying on allies in Viet Nam, stating that America had received "no significant support in Korea...the U.S. did essentially all of the fighting, took all the casualties, and paid all the bills."⁴ At first glance, therefore, it could be argued that our coalition partners provided no "value added" to military operations in Korea.

A more pragmatic view holds that without the coalition, the United States would have had to field another two divisions in Korea (the extent of the coalition's contribution), and would have borne another 15,000 casualties (the amount suffered by the coalition). In reality, the coalition forces made a valuable contribution to the military effort. They participated in all of the major battles, acquitted themselves well in combat, bore heavy casualties in proportion to their strength, and reimbursed the United States for the logistics support they received. After a visit to the front in 1951, the U.S. Secretary of Defense was "impressed with the complete amalgamation of the various United Nations units...into an integrated, coordinated fighting force."⁵

Forty years after Korea, the United States has come to appreciate the value of coalition partners, as shown in our

National Military Strategy:

"WE EXPECT TO STRENGTHEN WORLD RESPONSE TO CRISES THROUGH MULTILATERAL OPERATIONS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS [AND WE] MUST BE PREPARED TO FIGHT AS PART OF AN AD HOC COALITION...WHERE NO FORMAL SECURITY RELATIONSHIPS EXIST."⁶

Although we fought successfully with a coalition in Desert Storm, the ideal conditions which made a "100-hour war" possible may not exist next time. Instead, the Korean War--a protracted ground war--could be the paradigm for future conflicts. It is essential for the operational commander to be aware of the unique characteristics of this war, to ensure that he is prepared to effectively utilize coalition forces if a similar situation arises in the future.

Toward that end, this paper will use the Korean War as a case study to show that coalition forces can make a positive contribution on the battlefield, and to identify the areas that make the employment of these forces a challenge. Chapters II-IV will summarize the key aspects of the ground, naval, and air operations in Korea and the contributions made by our various coalition partners. Chapters V-VIII will explore issues relating to coalition force employment. Chapter IX will summarize the "lessons learned."

CHAPTER II

GROUND WAR

Overview of the Ground War. The ground war in Korea consisted of four distinct phases. The first phase, from the North Korean invasion to the Inchon landing, involved the defense of the Pusan Perimeter. The second phase began with the Inchon landing, continued with the push to the Yalu River and the subsequent Chinese intervention, and ended with the withdrawal of U.N. forces to the 38th parallel. The third phase included the Chinese Spring Offensive and the U.N. counteroffensive, and ended with relatively fixed battlefield positions. The final phase spanned the two years of armistice negotiations, and consisted primarily of positional warfare similar to that of WWI.⁷ Coalition forces fought in the key battles of each phase. As of 1953, 15 percent of the 155-mile front was held by non-U.S. and non-R.O.K. troops.⁸

First Commonwealth Division. Ground forces from the British Commonwealth operated in Korea throughout the war. Serving first as independent units attached to U.S. divisions, the forces were later combined into the 1st British Commonwealth Division, placed under a unified command, and attached to the U.S. I Corps.⁹

United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was the first non-U.S. nation to send ground forces to Korea, and her 27th Brigade helped defend the Pusan Perimeter. Over the course of the war, troops from nine British regiments served in Korea. One of these, the Gloucestershire Regiment, was awarded the Presidential

Unit Citation for its stand on "Gloucester Hill." This was called "the most outstanding example of unit bravery in modern warfare."¹⁰

Australia, Canada, New Zealand. Australia provided an infantry battalion,¹¹ New Zealand an artillery battalion,¹² and Canada a three-battalion infantry brigade.¹³ The Canadians and Australians were all-volunteer forces recruited from the general population. Battalions from both countries were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for heroism in the battle of Kapyong.¹⁴

Other Coalition Ground Forces. Ten other countries supplied brigade and battalion-sized formations to Korea, and these were attached directly to U.S. regiments and divisions.

Belgium. Belgium's volunteer infantry battalion was accompanied by a 44-man detachment from Luxembourg. Their most significant fighting was at the battle of Imjin River, for which they received the Presidential Unit Citation.¹⁵

Colombia. Colombia was the only Latin American country to send forces to Korea. Her infantry battalion, made up of volunteers from the regular Colombian army,¹⁶ saw its heaviest fighting in the Kumsong Offensive and at Pork Chop Hill. In one three-month period, the Colombians inflicted losses on the enemy estimated at 50 times their own.¹⁷

Ethiopia. Ethiopia was the only African nation to send ground forces to Korea. Her infantry battalion was an all-volunteer force from the Imperial Bodyguard.¹⁸ The Ethiopians

were the only unit in Korea that did not lose a prisoner or have any man unaccounted for.¹⁹ As stated by the U.S. Army Chief of Staff: "No braver or finer troops ever fought in Korea. They were never driven from the battlefield. They returned as they went out--all together--whether they were living or wounded or dead."²⁰

France. The French supplied an all-volunteer infantry battalion of professional soldiers, led by a highly-decorated general who reverted to the rank of lieutenant colonel to bring the forces to Korea. They saw hard fighting at the Twin Tunnels, Chipyeong-ni, Hongchon, and Heartbreak Ridge.²¹ Within three months of entering combat, the battalion had suffered the highest proportion of casualties of any nation but the United States and the Republic of Korea.²² Altogether, the battalion earned three Presidential Unit Citations.²³

Netherlands. The Netherlands infantry battalion first saw action at Wonju, where it earned the Presidential Unit Citation for its "courageous four-day stand" against the enemy.²⁴

Turkey. Turkey was the fourth largest contributor of combat forces to Korea. Her brigade took part in some of the hardest fighting in the war, losing one-fifth of its personnel at Kunuri.²⁵ The brigade was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for gallantry during the battle of Kumyangjang-ni.²⁶

Greece, Thailand, the Philippines. Each of these countries sent infantry battalions to Korea, and they all saw hard fighting during the various phases of the conflict.²⁷

CHAPTER III

NAVAL WAR

Overview of the Naval War. On July 4, 1950, President Truman ordered a blockade of the Korean coast, and the United Nations Blockade and Escort Force was quickly organized as part of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. It included separate task groups covering Korea's east and west coasts: the east coast group was under U.S. operational control, and included the U.S. naval assets; the west coast group was under the command of a British admiral, and included the Commonwealth's naval vessels and most of the other coalition naval forces.²⁸ There was close coordination between the U.S. and British staffs, and the two task groups regularly shared assets along both coasts.²⁹

The North Korean "gunboat navy" was disposed of soon after the blockade was declared.³⁰ For the duration of the war, the coalition naval forces maintained control of the sea, provided fire support for ground forces, carried out shore bombardment of lines of communication and other targets, conducted anti-submarine patrols, escorted aircraft carriers, supported commando raids behind enemy lines, and protected various islands along the coasts.³¹ Coalition aircraft carrier planes flew direct support missions, and provided reconnaissance for ground troops, spotting for naval bombardment, and air cover for U.N. ships.³² The Inchon landing and the evacuation of Hungnam were supported by coalition naval forces.³³

There was concern at the time that the blockade was ineffective, since the enemy continued to be supplied despite the (mistaken) belief that air force bombing had cut the enemy's overland supply routes.³⁴ In reality, the blockade was highly effective. A study conducted by the U.S. Office of Naval Operations determined that any "leakage" of the blockade was by small craft operating around the islands along the coasts, but that it was at most a "trickle" of troops and supplies.³⁵

Coalition Naval Forces. Australia, Canada, Colombia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom supplied a total of 5 aircraft carriers, 5 cruisers, 17 destroyers, 17 frigates, and numerous support vessels. Canada's destroyer HMCS NOOTKA had the honor of capturing a North Korean minelayer, the only enemy vessel taken during the war.³⁶

CHAPTER IV

AIR WAR

Overview of the Air War. The Commander, Far East Air Force, controlled all air operations in Korea;³⁷ although the United States provided the majority of air assets, coalition forces were there as well. The primary contribution of coalition air forces was in the close air support of ground troops, the interdiction of enemy lines of supply and communication, bomber escort, reconnaissance, transportation, and aerial combat.

Coalition Air Forces. Canada, Thailand, and Greece provided air transportation assets, and Greece's Skytrain aircraft group earned the Presidential Unit Citation for its actions at the Chosin Reservoir during the Chinese intervention.³⁸ The United Kingdom provided artillery spotter aircraft and three squadrons of Sunderland Flying Boats for maritime reconnaissance.³⁹ Combat squadrons were provided by Australia and South Africa, and Canadian pilots flew combat missions while attached to the U.S. Fifth Air Force. Australia's 77th Squadron was the first non-U.S. force to fight in Korea, and was instrumental in defending the Pusan Perimeter.⁴⁰ South Africa's "Flying Cheetah" Squadron demonstrated "classic examples of airmanship and courage" in their front line support and interdiction operations.⁴¹

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Political considerations can have a fundamental impact on military operations, particularly when the cooperation of many nations is required for success. The interaction of multiple Clausewitzian "trinities" creates a dynamic and potentially fragile partnership that can be fractured if the interests of individual nations are threatened. This chapter will look at the political aspects of the Korean War, in which the coalition held together for over three years of conflict. The first two sections will show that our coalition partners were reliable. They had strong political reasons for participating in the war, and their force contributions had a national significance beyond their comparatively small numbers. The third section explores the relationship between politics and the acceptance of coalition assistance. Finally, the political ramifications of coalition force employment will be discussed.

Reasons for Participation. Each of our coalition partners joined the war effort because they supported the overall goals of resisting aggression and halting the spread of Communism. In addition, many had political reasons of their own for participating. Britain wanted to return to that level of influence with the United States that she enjoyed in WWII.⁴² Colombia wanted to assert herself as a viable "player" on the world stage. Others, like Turkey, felt they might need U.N help in the future.⁴³ Ethiopia wanted to express solidarity with the

collective effort, because she had felt herself abandoned by the League of Nations in WWII.⁴⁴ Unity of effort in Korea was thus achieved through a synergy of collective purpose and complementary national objectives.

Significance of Contributions. Despite the demonstrated commitment of our coalition partners, the American public at the time felt the contributions were not enough. In reality, fielding even small forces was a significant burden for some of the countries. Luxembourg's 44-man detachment may have seemed like a token contribution, except that her total armed forces were only a few hundred strong.⁴⁵ Colombia only supplied an infantry battalion and a frigate, but it cost her every week what she used to spend to support her entire army and navy for a year.⁴⁶ It must also be remembered that many of our partners were simultaneously fighting regional conflicts of their own. The British were trying to contain an insurrection in Malaya and the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.⁴⁷ France was deeply embroiled in Indochina, and the Philippines was dealing with the Huk Rebellion.⁴⁸ Most important, these partners and some of the others were willing to join the war effort even though they were just beginning to recover from WWII.⁴⁹

Korea was also a war of "firsts" for many of the countries. The dispatch of her destroyers was the first time Canada had placed a military force under a foreign commander in peacetime.⁵⁰ It was the first time since 1923 that the Turkish army had seen action,⁵¹ the first time in 127 years that Colombian troops had

fought on foreign soil,⁵² and the first time Ethiopia had waged war outside of Africa for 13 centuries.⁵³ Nevertheless, people in these countries vigorously supported the troop commitment. In Canada, 15,000 men applied for Korean service, in a time of full national employment;⁵⁴ in Ethiopia, for every man in the volunteer force, 10 had been rejected who wanted to come.⁵⁵

Political Aspects of Coalition Assistance. As the U.N. Commander, the United States was responsible for accepting or rejecting offers of military assistance from potential coalition members, and such decisions often had a political significance which superseded operational considerations. For example, the U.S. turned down an offer of 33,000 troops from Taiwan, in part because their use would have been provocative to Communist China.⁵⁶ Our reliance on Japan for equipment and logistics support⁵⁷ may have contributed to the Soviet Union's accusation that we were employing Japanese troops in the field.⁵⁸ The desire to limit force contributions to an operationally-significant size (battalion or higher)⁵⁹ precluded accepting the offers of Cuba and Bolivia, who would have given smaller contingents, and Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Panama, who would have let men volunteer on an individual basis.⁶⁰ Small nations like this protested the troop size limitation because it prevented them from performing their "legal and moral obligations to the United Nations."⁶¹ On a more positive note, the presence of at least some forces from Latin America and Africa helped to

allay any perception by newly-independent states that the Korean War was an "imperialist campaign."⁶²

Employment of Forces. The employment of coalition force could also be a politically sensitive issue with repercussion far beyond the immediate operation. Britain was assigned control of the west coast portion of the naval blockade primarily because she recognized Communist China--if a Commonwealth vessel strayed into Chinese waters, the situation could be resolved diplomatically.⁶³ Also, it was possible to offend a nation through an operational employment, such as when British and Canadian troops were sent to guard the POW camp on Kojedo, soon after the insurrection in which the camp commander was captured. Both governments accused the U.S. of trying to spread the blame for the condition of the camp.⁶⁴ Many of our coalition partners were determined to keep the war limited at all costs, and vigorously protested anything done without full consultation which they feared might escalate the conflict.⁶⁵ In one case, pilots were denied permission to conduct "hot pursuit" of enemy aircraft across the Chinese border because five of our allies thought it would be provocative.⁶⁶ In another case--the bombing of power plants on the Yalu River--serious diplomatic tension arose because the U.S. failed to consult with Britain beforehand.⁶⁷ Fortunately, no incidents of this type ever proved serious enough to disrupt the coalition.

CHAPTER VI

LOGISTICS

The United States provided nearly all of the clothing, rations, equipment, and weapons used by the coalition partners, except the Commonwealth Division forces. They were provisioned through a separate British supply line (although a portion of their supplies were furnished by the U.S. as well).⁶⁸ Despite the complexity of the coalition force, logistics never became a "war stopper," although there were some unique challenges to overcome.⁶⁹ These will be summarized below.

Food. Cultural and religious preferences dictated some modifications to combat rations to accommodate the coalition forces. The Turks, who were Muslims, required a special pork-free ration. Thais were given an allowance of 2-1/2 ounces of Tabasco sauce per man per week. The Filipinos did not like the local rice, so theirs had to be shipped in from Manila. The French insisted on baking their own bread, and the Ethiopians cooked their own meals in accordance with their orthodox Coptic Christian tradition.⁷⁰

Clothing. Most of the coalition forces wound up wearing U.S. uniforms at some point, if only piece-by-piece as their native uniforms wore out.⁷¹ Problems ranged from the British Argyll's objection to brown combat boots--they had worn black ones for over a century⁷²--to the Thai soldiers' need for specially-made shoes to accommodate their extra-wide feet.⁷³ The real challenge, however, was outfitting the forces for the cold

weather. The sub-zero Korean winter was a surprise for the Ethiopians and Australians, who had never seen snow,⁷⁴ and the Canadians, who had expected tropical conditions.⁷⁵ Several of the units--including the Ethiopians and the British 27th Brigade--had shown up in summer uniforms. It was generally felt that Americans "did a fine job" providing cold weather gear,⁷⁶ although many of the coalition troops had to be trained in its use.⁷⁷

Transportation. Transportation was a major concern for our coalition partners, many of whom either lacked organic equipment or showed up with antiquated, pre-WWII vehicles. Even with the proper equipment, the smaller units had to wait for hours or days to travel while road priority was given to U.S. convoys.⁷⁸ Maintenance and operation were also problems, as some coalition units were deemed mechanically incompetent,⁷⁹ and there was a shortage of trained drivers in others.⁸⁰ As a result, the U.S. provided most of the transportation within the theater.

An idea of the problems encountered by our partners can be summarized by the experience of the Turkish brigade. The Turks brought with them obsolete trucks which became a traffic menace when they broke down.⁸¹ As a result, the brigade requested American equipment for their use in the battle of Kunu-ri. Unfortunately, the quantity of vehicles provided was less than promised, they were delivered late, and they had to be given back before the Turks actually reached the battle area.⁸² If the vehicles had been left at the Turks' disposal, their mobility and

firepower would have increased, and their casualties might have been less.⁵³

Reimbursement. The United States signed formal agreements with the coalition partners to cover reimbursement for the logistical support provided by the U.S. during the war,⁵⁴ and had issued direction on control and accounting of supplied materials four days after the war broke out. However, it was not until the summer of 1951 that satisfactory administrative procedures were in place and working.⁵⁵ Keeping track of what the individual coalition partners used remained a significant burden to the quartermasters, since the coalition forces attached to U.S. units drew from common supplies as if they were U.S. troops.⁵⁶ A different problem resulted from Britain's establishment of a pool accounting system for the countries within her Commonwealth Division who drew U.S. supplies: reimbursement from all of these countries would be funneled to the U.S. through Britain. Britain at first refused to settle her account, and it was not until 1964, after protracted negotiations, that she finally paid up.⁵⁷

CHAPTER VII

THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

The presence of diverse forces in Korea provided a unique challenge to the operational commander through differences in language, culture, and command and control procedures. These problems were largely overcome due to the preponderance of U.S. forces in the theater and the U.N. command structure, but there were certainly opportunities for improvement.

Language. The U.N. Command specified that English be the basic language for the participants in Korea.⁸⁸ All orders, instructions, and directives went out in English, and the burden of translation fell on each of the U.N. units themselves.⁸⁹ Some countries selected their officers for their English skills, and liaison personnel were exchanged between the coalition forces and U.S. units. However, the fact remains that at least 13 languages plus a number of regional dialects were spoken in Korea, and translation resources were usually inadequate.⁹⁰ The U.N. Command tried to ease the situation of the Philippine and Colombian battalions by assigning them to the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican Regiment. Unfortunately, the Filipinos spoke Tagalog,⁹¹ and it was decided that the Colombians would provide for a more equitable distribution of U.N. forces if they were assigned elsewhere.⁹² A more tragic situation was experienced by the Turkish Brigade. After their heroic stand at Kunu-ri, they were unable to ask for directions to find their way back to the

U.S. lines. Until the Turks straggled back in, the Americans assumed they had fled the battle, and wrote them off as lost."

Culture. The Korean War was a time of social change in the U.S. military, as African-Americans were for the first time integrated into previously all-white units. The presence of coalition forces resulted in some cultural friction as well. The Ethiopian commander insisted that his troops not be referred to as "Negroes,"⁹⁴ and a U.S. Regimental executive officer referred to the Thai Regimental Commander as a "gook."⁹⁵ Despite such isolated incidents, however, the policy of keeping U.N. units attached to the same U.S. division or corps helped to develop mutual understanding and esprit de corps.⁹⁶ Probably the most unique accommodation of cultural differences was when the U.N. Command flew in a flock of sheep so the Greeks could perform their customary Easter sacrifice.⁹⁷

Cultural differences can be exploited by the enemy to split a coalition, and the Chinese tried to do this in Korea. First, they focussed attacks against the coalition units on the front line, thinking perhaps to demoralize these troops or to find a "weak link" in the defense. This happened to the Ethiopians repeatedly.⁹⁸ Second, coalition POWs were sometimes treated with more "leniency" than Americans in the hopes of gaining a propaganda coup through U.N. defections. Thanks to the good integration of the coalition troops, however, these attempts at disrupting the coalition failed.⁹⁹

Command and Control. Command relationships within the coalition were established from the very beginning, and included formal agreements between the U.S. and its partners stating that coalition forces would obey the orders of U.S. commanders.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the senior military representative in the theater for each nation had direct access to the U.N. Commander on matters of major policy, and could contact his government directly on administrative issues affecting his force.¹⁰¹

The U.S. and Britain provided the dominant command structures in Korea, and they were able to iron out differences in staff concepts, communication procedures, and military terminology because of their shared experiences in WWII.¹⁰² Good examples were the implementation of common signalling procedures and maneuvering instructions for the coalition navies,¹⁰³ and the adoption of standard map sizes that each of the forces could reproduce.¹⁰⁴ However, the U.S. and Britain differed in how they prepared operational orders;¹⁰⁵ on at least one occasion, a Commonwealth fleet commander did not like the U.S. version. For the Inchon landing, he was given "two enormous volumes" of operational orders which specified everything needed down to paperclips, but had "no reference to the nature of enemy resistance, adverse weather conditions, actions to be taken in the event of heavy minelaying, or other considerations of basic interest to the operational commander."¹⁰⁶ This experience highlights the need for simplicity in communication, even among partners who speak the same language.

CHAPTER VIII

TACTICAL ISSUES

The two major U.N. powers in Korea--the U.S. and Great Britain--provided the bulk of military doctrinal concepts. As a result, there were no tactical mismatches serious enough to jeopardize the war effort. There were, however, occasions in which the coalition was strained when the U.S. showed poor leadership on the battlefield. This chapter will look at the some of these tactical issues, including the training of coalition forces, examples of tactical differences, and areas where the U.S. needed to improve its battlefield performance vis-a-vis the coalition partners.

Training. The combat readiness of coalition forces ranged from the Greeks, who were experienced mountain fighters, to the New Zealanders, who had never handled artillery before their regiment was formed a few months earlier.¹⁰⁷ Some of our partners, including the Colombians,¹⁰⁸ Ethiopians,¹⁰⁹ and Canadians,¹¹⁰ had undergone preliminary training with U.S. Army advisers before deploying to Korea. U.S. and Canadian navies had also developed combined tactical doctrine, and had carried out battle workups for the Canadian destroyers headed to Korea.¹¹¹ Within Korea, the U.S. Army set up the U.N. Reception Center (UNRC), whose mission in part was to "provide familiarization training with U.S. Army weapons and equipment."¹¹² The UNRC was used for everything from a brief indoctrination to major unit training,¹¹³ and it was here that many of the problem areas would

"shake out" before units went into combat. The amount of training given the various coalition forces depended on their capabilities, and most received additional training once they reached their assigned U.S. units.¹¹⁴ No Commonwealth troops ever passed through the UNRC, as the British had set up their own reception and training center in Korea.¹¹⁵

Tactical Differences. Despite the training they received, some of the coalition forces retained tactical "idiosyncracies" that were disruptive to operations. The French disliked marching at night, and they lit huge campfires even when they were near enemy positions.¹¹⁶ The Turks marched in closely packed columns, providing prime targets for ambushes.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the U.S. adopted many coalition practices that were superior, such as Turkish bayonet techniques,¹¹⁸ British methods of consolidating ground,¹¹⁹ and the Commonwealth methods of artillery communication.¹²⁰

U.S. Performance on the Battlefield. A greater problem than minor tactical differences was the poor performance the U.S. forces sometimes displayed in working with the coalition on the battlefield. Although we signed agreements with some of our partners to not hold each other liable for deaths of personnel or destruction of property in the war,¹²¹ such things weakened the morale of the coalition forces, particularly when the losses were seen as resulting from U.S. mistakes. Friendly fire is a prime example. Almost every front line unit on the Pusan Perimeter came under friendly aircraft fire at some point, including the

British 27th Brigade.¹²² They had called for air support and were hit by a U.S. napalm strike. Although most of the British troops were killed, both sides appear to have attributed it to the "fog of war" and no ill will was harbored.¹²³ Unfortunately, the problem seems not to have been rectified, since the U.S. also napalmed Australian positions at Kapyong in 1951.¹²⁴

We were also prone to abandon our partners during the wholesale retreat after the Chinese intervention, known at the time as "bugging out." On at least three occasions, U.S. troops withdrew without warning the Turks, who became encircled by the enemy and had to fight their way out with horrendous losses.¹²⁵ The British were time and again forced to cover the retreat of U.S. forces, and at times suffered friendly fire from panicking U.S. soldiers.¹²⁶ It got so bad that the British and Turks had begun to protest U.S. decisions to withdraw; at one point, the French, Dutch, Greek, and Turkish contingents requested to be placed under British rather than U.S. command.¹²⁷ It eventually became U.S. policy that U.S. troops, not our coalition partners, would be the last out under withdrawal.¹²⁸

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Legally, there is only an armistice in Korea. The U.N. Command is still in existence, and periodic reports of its activities are provided to the U.N. Security Council.¹²⁹ Korea has continued to be one of the world's "hot spots," and this tenuous situation is described in our National Military Strategy:

THE KOREAN PENINSULA REMAINS DIVIDED IN STARK CONTRAST WITH THE END OF THE COLD WAR IN EUROPE. LOGIC DICTATES THAT CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, BUT THE TRANSITION PERIOD IS LIKELY TO BE FRAUGHT WITH GREAT RISKS.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, the U.N. forces accomplished the political objectives expressed by President Truman in 1951: "to repel attack and to restore peace."¹³¹ This demonstration of effective collective action may also have deterred aggression elsewhere in the world.¹³²

The presence of our coalition partners added value to the military effort. They gave the war an international legitimacy which it may have lacked otherwise, and they helped keep it limited at a time when some domestic critics (such as General MacArthur) were calling for escalation. Moreover, the coalition forces fought hard in battle. Their courage and ability was recognized by U.S. commanders, who awarded citations for bravery to many of the units.

In two respects, the U.S. was fortunate in Korea. The coalition achieved unity of effort through its strong collective and national objectives, and our partners maintained their commitment throughout the war. Also, the overwhelming presence

of U.S. forces in Korea, and our established command position as the U.N.'s executive agent, allowed us to overcome many of the problems discussed in this paper. These problems could easily have been magnified--and the resolutions made more difficult--if we had been a junior partner rather than the dominant member of the coalition.

A number of lessons can be drawn from our experiences in Korea. First, the use of coalition forces brings with it political "baggage" that can affect operations. Offers of assistance might have to be turned down in spite of operational need, because of the political statement their acceptance would make; on the other hand, turning down a country's offer could cost us that country's political support, at a time when political cohesion might be as important as success on the battlefield. In addition, political considerations can either hinder or enhance the operational commander's ability to employ coalition forces in specific situations.

Logisticians must take into account the unique requirements of coalition forces in areas such as food, clothing, and transportation. Providing for these needs is essential for preserving morale and ensuring the combat effectiveness of our coalition partners.

Communication is the key to working with diversity, whether in the office or on the battlefield. The lack of translators in Korea placed an undue burden on the multilingual force and hampered their training and operations. In the future, U.S.

manuals and training aids should be available to our partners in their native languages; even better, foreign language skills should be a part of our officers' professional development.

Even among forces that speak the same language, differences in tactical doctrine, military terminology, planning procedures, and equipment skills can lead to confusion on the battlefield. Standardization should continue to be developed through combined exercises and training of foreign officers at our military schools, and should be expanded to include as wide a range of potential coalition partners as possible.¹³³

Finally, the "eyes of the world" are on us as they observe how we employ the troops they have entrusted to our command. It is therefore critical that coalition forces receive equitable treatment and combat exposure to the greatest extent possible.¹³⁴

In a world so interconnected by political and economic interests, it is difficult to imagine a future conflict that did not involve a coalition. Despite the vast strength of our armed forces, it is important to recognize the value which even small nations can provide:

"THE CONTRIBUTION OF A SINGLE WEAK NATION IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED, AND YET THE SUM OF THE WEAK NATIONS' CONTRIBUTIONS MAY CONCEIVABLY BE THE BALANCING FACTOR AMONG IRRECONCILABLE GIANTS"¹³⁵

Whether the next war looks like Korea, Desert Storm, or something in between, U.S. forces must be prepared to fight with soldiers of every nationality, race, and religion.¹³⁶ As the Korean War showed, diversity can be a source of strength on the battlefield.

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